WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY—Founded December 19, 1857 NOVEMBER 1975

WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Everybody is telling us how we should run the Washtenaw County Historical Society.

And we think it's great!

Just recently someone said, "I would like a meeting where we could learn how to make braided rugs, corn husk dolls, quilts, spinning, candle making, tin work."

Someone else said, "And why not throw in a taffy pull. I haven't pulled taffy since I was knee high to a foot stool."'

So Dave Pollock, our Executive VP will have just such a meeting after the first of the year.

So if you have any great ideas for some fun meetings give David a call (971-6847) and he will try to oblige. Let us know what kind of meetings you would like.

10 – 4

Thomas F. Lacy

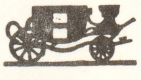
WCHS SETS $3 JOINT FEE

Dave Pollock, chairman of a fee committee, has announced that persons who are already members of local historical societies in Washtenaw County may join the Washtenaw County Historical Society for an additional fee of $3, either as individuals or couples. Currently those who are only WCHS members pay $3 annual dues for individuals and $5 for couples.

WCHS MEMBERSHIP INVITED TO DECEMBER OPEN HOUSE

Instead of a December meeting, members of the Washtenaw County Historical Society have been invited to a holiday open house at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas C. Lacy, 126 N. Division St., Ann Arbor.

They live in the historic Wilson-Wahr house which the society visited a few years ago on a spring tour. The open house will be from 3 to 6 p.m. Sunday, December 21.



ORAL HISTORY' IS TOPIC FOR GENEALOGY SECTION

Lydia Muncy will discuss how to gather oral history at the meeting of the Genealogy Section of WCHS at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 23 at the Manchester Township Library, 202 W. Main St., Manchester.

Anyone with a genealogical problem they wish to talk over is invited to come early, Polly Bender, secretary, said.

DR. ROSS WILL APPROACH AMERICAN BICENTENNIAL FROM DIFFERENT VIEWPOINT

Dr. C. Howard Ross will take a slightly different approach to American Revolutionary history when he addresses the Washtenaw County Historical Society in November.

His topic will be "The Other George". The meeting will be at 8 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 20 in Liberty Hall at Ann Arbor Federal Savings & Loan, Liberty at Division St.

Dr. Ross is a past president of WCHS.

CERTIFICATES ARE NOW AVAILABLE FOR FAMILIES WHO CAME TO MICHIGAN 100 YEARS AGO OR MORE

Did your ancestors come to Michigan in 1876 or before?

If you can show acceptable proof of it you may obtain a Michigan Centennial Pioneer Family Certificate suitable for framing in time for Christmas if you act now.

The certificates are being offered by the Michigan Genealogical Council in cooperation with the history division of the state library as a bicentennial project.

An application with lineage chart showing your descent from the ancestor and proof of his having been in Michigan in 1876 or before must be submitted and validated.

Dr. William F. Bender of WCHS is state chairman of the project. Local historical societies have been asked to publicize it and make applications available. Where there is no historical society, local libraries have been asked to help.

Locally inquiries may be made to Dr. or Mrs. Bender, 668-6925 or Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Muncy, 663-3761.

The certificates are off white with black printing and touches of blue. The fee is $2. Proofs should be Xerox copies, not originals, as they are to be placed on file at the state library. They will not be returned.

WCHS TAKES TRIP INTO PAST AT U-M OBSERVATORY

The WCHS visit to the old University Observatory was a trip into the past in more than one way.

Not only did those attending learn of the beginnings of astronomy at Michigan. They also learned a little of how it felt to be an astronomy student in the 19th century on a chill, gray October day without heat or electric lights.

The subject and location of the meeting was the original three-room north portion of the observatory built in 1854. It is on the National Register of Historic Places and is slated to be restored. The larger south portion of the building erected in 1910 is soon to be torn down, Dr. W. Albert Hiltner, chairman of the astronomy department, said.

Dr. Orren C. Mohler of the same department traced the history of the observatory and the personalities who influenced its development.

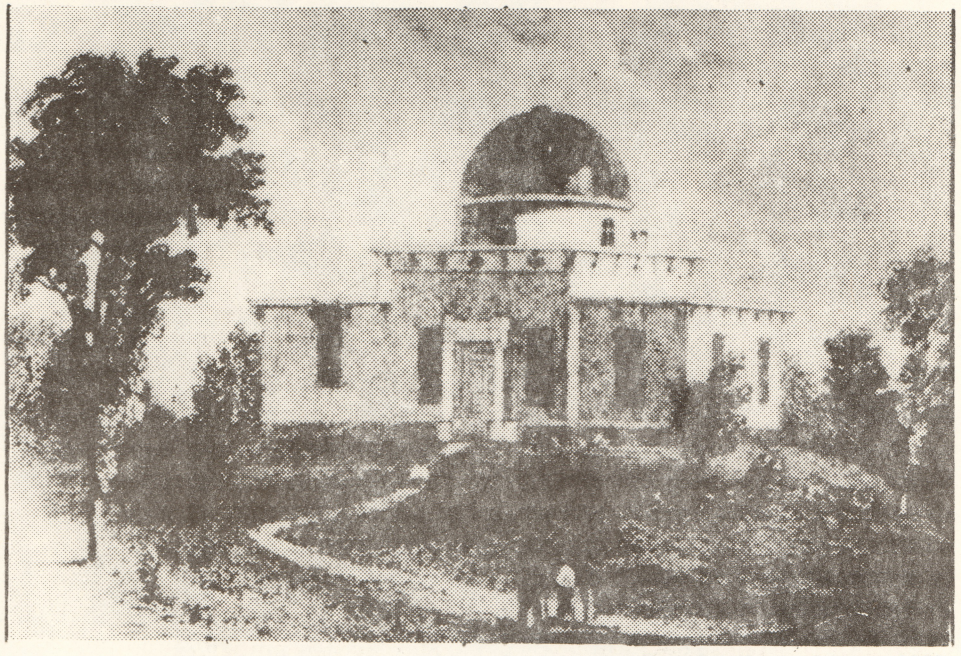
The audience gathered in the west room, originally used as a director's office and library and the only part originally heated, probably by a stove.

The high ceilings, bare wood floor, the architectural detail as well as the peeling wallpaper and faded dark red lining of the empty bookshelves all suggest it is one of the oldest buildings on campus. It has been unused since 1965.

Judge Augustus B. Woodward included "astronomia" in the course of study he envisioned for the University in 1817 before there were any buildings or classes, Mohler noted.

But it was not until 1852 and the coming of Henry Philip Tappan as first president of the University on the Ann Arbor campus that anything was done about it.

Dr. Tappan was an admirer of the Prussian system of education.



From painting by Cropsey, 1855

THE U–M'S DETROIT OBSERVATORY

Mohler noted, and "sort of an astronomical nut" as well. One of his first actions as president was to go to Detroit to raise money for an observatory.

Detroit's leading citizens pledged $15,000 and it was named "Detroit Observatory" in their honor. The total original cost of building and instruments was $22,000 with $7,000 of it from the U–M.

Probably the most influential Detroiter was Henry Nelson Walker, a prominent lawyer with interests in Upper Peninsula iron mines and the railroad that was later the Michigan Central.

Tappan wanted a meridian circle telescope and Walker promised him the money for it. The two went to New York City and Tappan went on to Europe to get necessary instruments.

Meanwhile, Walker, an aggressive sort, went ahead and made arrangements with Henry Fitz, a leading New York telescope maker for a 12½ inch equatorial telescope. While Tappan was still in Europe a four-acre site was purchased outside the city on a hill overlooking the Huron River valley. Walker arranged for George Bird of New York City to superintend construction. The layout was typical of observatories of the time.

When Tappan returned he was not pleased with the location which he thought too far from the city. He thought it should be in the center of the main campus, in front of today's graduate library.

No one in this country having accepted the director's job, Tappan hired Dr. Franz F. E. Brunnow of the Royal Observatory in Berlin who had superintended construction of the meridian circle telescope.

Brunnow was an able astronomer. He had published a number of books on astronomy including a textbook on spherical astronomy which was a fundamental text for beginning astronomers in the latter third of the 19th century.

But he had a running battle

with the English language and was never highly popular or successful here, Prof. Mohler said. He did have one able student, James Craig Watson, who went on to succeed him.

An apocryphal story on campus has it that a visiting state legislator looked around and saw only one student to which Dr. Brunnow is supposed to have replied, "Yes, but that student is Watson."

Brunnow apparently did find favor with Tappan's daughter whom he married a couple of years after he came.

In 1863, however, the University Regents fired Tappan. Brunnow immediately resigned and the two with their families went to Europe for the rest of their lives. Brunnow became chief astronomer of Trinity College, Dublin, and Astronomer Royal for Ireland.

Watson was the first to make real use of the 12 inch telescope, Mohler said. Watson discovered 22 minor planets, 21 of them through that telescope. Watson also wrote, "Theoretical Astronomy", the foundation of all graduate study in the latter half of the 19th century.

Watson who was born in Ontario came to Ann Arbor with his widowed mother where she thought he might have a better chance in life. At age 12 he began to earn a living. He attended Ann Arbor High School for one month, then entered the U—M at 15 and became Brunnow's prize student.

Toward the end of his life Watson got interested in eclipses. Movement of the planet Mercury could not be explained by Newton's Law and Watson hypothesized that the movement must be different because of the presence of other planets between the sun and Mercury.

Watson observed an eclipse at Separation, Wyo., on the Continental Divide, and thought he discovered two planets closer to the sun. Returning to the University, he issued an ultimatum to get him a special telescope for daytime sky viewing.

The money was not forthcoming and the University of Wisconsin agreed to build him such a telescope so he went there. He was there two years but the telescope was never finished. He died there of pneumonia. No one now believes he would have discovered such planets, Mohler added.

Mark Walrod Harrington, the next director, was a real character, Mohler said. He was interested in biology and botany and there was a tradition that he taught every subject offered by the U—M. He later turned his attention to meteorology and founded the United States Weather Service for the U. S. Signal Corps and was president of the University of Washington. Toward the end of his life he went crazy and disappeared, Mohler said.

He was followed by Asaph Hall IV, son of a famous astronomer. He was remembered as the man who pestered the regents for money for a spectograph for the department--unsuccessfully.

He was succeeded in the early 1900's by William Joseph Hussey. Before he could afford to go to school, Hussey had started a printing business to earn money. Half-way through engineering school he had to leave to earn more money. This time he surveyed railroads westward. From the necessity of using stars in surveying, his interest turned to astronomy.

He went to California where he was on the staff of Leland Stanford University and became director of one of the first large mountain observatories in California.

Back here at the U—M he got the 37 inch reflecting telescope in the new wing and a spectograph.

He was interested in double stars, particularly those in the part of the sky invisible in the northern hemisphere. He arranged for the Lamont-Hussey Observatory in South Africa and a telescope was sent there. He estimated he could finish his observations in five years but unfortunately he died on the way to South Africa in 1927. After that astronomy education took a different turn, Prof. Mohler concluded.

For a period of years before 1924 the Observatory derived income from selling time service to the Michigan Central Railroad. After that radio time service was available from the Naval Observatory.

Most of today's astronomical observations are made away from Ann Arbor. The U—M has cooperative arrangements to use a 24 inch telescope in Chile one-third time and a 52 inch reflector half-time at Kitt Peak, Ariz. The latter is shared with Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Dartmouth.

These sites offer better viewing. The sky in Chile is clear 70 percent of the time. Away from lights, fainter objects can be seen. While the 12 inch telescope here in the old observatory is still a good instrument, street lights interfere with viewing.

The audience toured the building. A propane lantern was used to light the east room which was once illuminated with whale oil lamps. There, removing the dust covering, Prof. Hiltner showed the old meridian circle telescope. On it is a brass plate with the name of its donor, Henry Nelson Walker. Unlike the telescope in the dome, the user of this instrument could do his viewing from an adjustable couch.

The equatorial telescope in the dome rests on a pier whose foundations are 10 feet below ground and which rises 20 feet

above ground through the center of the building. Dr. Hiltner thinks the pier is one huge carved stone.

In the dome, he demonstrated how the hemispherical dome, 23 feet in diameter, could be turned around to any part of the sky with a rope and pulley arrangement and the shutter opened to permit viewing.

The 12½ inch telescope in the dome was the largest made in the United States at the time and third largest in the world, exceeded only by one at Harvard and one in Russia.

Dr. Hiltner hopes to collect and display some of the old astronomy equipment in the building, including a beautiful 1854 clock and perhaps even set up the 12½ telescope for public viewing when the restoration is complete.

WHEN VANDERBILT BLOCKADED THE GRAND TRUNK

RAILROADING IN 1878-79

By Cleland B. Wyllie

(The writer, now director of media relations for the University of Michigan, grew up in Durand, Mich., where his father was stationmaster. Sunday trips to the depot with his father sparked a lifelong interest in railroads. He originally gave this paper at a WCHS meeting April 25, 1974.)

Tonight I want to take you back to a period during 1878 and 1879 when there was a pretty good chance for a brief period that Ann Arbor would be involved in another rail route to Chicago.

I'll have to set the stage for you. The Michigan Central had reached Ann Arbor in 1839 and then in 1877, the Toledo & Ann Arbor Railroad had reached here with active assistance by Ann Arbor residents who had been worried about having only one railroad to serve the area.

Up until Monday, June 24, 1878, the Michigan Central had been operated as an independent line. On that date, however, William H. Vanderbilt of the New York Central exercised his voting rights as the major stockholder to take over control of the M. C.

With this accomplished, he began a series of moves aimed at making it difficult for the Grand Trunk of Canada to get to Chicago with freight and passengers. The Grand Trunk had reached Sarnia, Ont., in the 1850's. In November of 1859, the Chicago, Detroit and Canada Grand Trunk Junction Railroad was opened between Port Huron and Detroit with a Michigan Central connection at Detroit Junction.

Through this new railroad and the M. C., the Grand Trunk provided both freight and passenger service to Chicago without any noticeable problems until Vanderbilt took over the Michigan Central.

The Grand Trunk's competitive situation took another turn for the worse on Thursday, June 27, when Vanderbilt surprised the Grand Trunk with a blockade of the Chicago & North Eastern, a vital 46-mile segment from Flint to Lansing which had given the financially troubled Chicago and Lake Huron an entry to Chicago via the Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne & Chicago at Valparaiso, Ind.

Due to the financial troubles besetting the Chicago and Lake Huron whose Eastern Division ran from Port Huron to Flint and whose Western Division ran from Lansing to Valparaiso, the connecting link, built mostly by C&LH money, had been constructed as a separate railroad. There was to be no sale of C&NE stock or bonds without notice to the C&LH officials.

But James M. Turner, president of the C&NE and a Lansing resident, secretly had sold Vanderbilt a controlling interest in the C&NE and Vanderbilt used his control to blockade the road at Flint and put an end to the operation of the Great Eastern Fast Freight Line which the Grand Trunk had been operating in conjunction with the C&LH.

Possibly the reports were overly optimistic but word out of Chicago had been that the C&LH was turning over to the Grand Trunk from 140 to 300 loads a day.

Vanderbilt brought all of this to a halt with his blockade and the imposition of such high rates that it wasn't profitable for the Grand Trunk to move freight for Chicago via the Chicago and Lake Huron. Passenger traffic via the C&LH did continue but the Grand Trunk's major passenger route was via the Michigan Central.

So Vanderbilt had the Grand Trunk blocked via the Chicago and Lake Huron route and he also had control of the more vital route via the Michigan Central. And to make the situation worse, earlier in the month Vanderbilt had taken over the Canada Southern which ran from Buffalo to Amherstburg, Ont., thus offering the distinct threat that the Michigan Central would interchange all Chicago traffic with the Canada Southern rather than the Grand Trunk.

Vanderbilt regarded the Grand Trunk as serious competition. He also was concerned because the Grand Trunk due to its much longer route from Portland, Me., via Montreal, Port Huron and Detroit to Chicago had been permitted to charge lower rates on Chicago traffic. Because of the longer route and winter blockades due to snow, the Grand Trunk hadn't been too serious a competitor. But after

the road was changed to standard gauge in 1872, interchange of traffic was easier and the Grand Trunk had been showing a greater increase in traffic than the trunk lines in the United States.

Put all of these things together and the Grand Trunk obviously was at the mercy of Vanderbilt. And because of this the possibility existed for a brief while that the Grand Trunk would turn to a route via Ann Arbor and a connection at Milan with the Wabash to get to and from Chicago.

Both in Ann Arbor and Toledo there had been interest in extending the Toledo and Ann Arbor in a northeasterly direction to connect at South Lyon with the Detroit, Lansing & Northern and on to Pontiac to hook up with the Detroit & Milwaukee. Added to these connections was the possibility that the Grand Trunk would extend its Michigan Air Line from Romeo to Pontiac.

Such an extension would permit the Grand Trunk to escape from the Vanderbilt blockade. A new company was organized in Ann Arbor on Sept. 16, 1878 with the name of the Toledo, Ann Arbor & Northeastern Railroad Co. Capital stock was set at $500,000 and the road was to be built from Ann Arbor to Pontiac.

President of the new railroad was James M. Ashley, also the president of the Toledo & Ann Arbor.

The new company did nothing about construction of the new route no doubt because Vanderbilt had adopted a conciliatory attitude towards the Grand Trunk after his triumphs in June. But the Grand Trunk still didn't trust Vanderbilt and there was activity, some of which didn't become public knowledge until much later.

The uneasy truce was definitely broken when Sir Henry Tyler, president of the Grand Trunk, faced his shareholders in London, England, on Tuesday, April 29, 1879 and announced that Vanderbilt was causing too much trouble. Grand Trunk receipts for the six months ending in December of 1878 had been down nearly a half million.

Sir Henry also cited a long list of complaints against the New York Central. Hundreds of cars of the Great Eastern Fast Freight Line were idle due to Vanderbilt's high rates over the Chicago and North Eastern and the Grand Trunk had been deprived of half the tonnage and 2/3rds of the receipts from the Chicago and Lake Huron. There had been a series of obstructions on interchange at Buffalo. And the Michigan Central was charging the Grand Trunk higher rates than were charged the New York Central; in some cases the rates were double.

So Sir Henry said the Grand Trunk was going to obtain its own route to Chicago. He cited the possibility of a route via the Chicago and Lake Huron to Flint, the Flint and Pere Marquette from Flint to Ludington and by ferries to Manitowoc, Wisconsin.

Although he called them car ferries in his discussion with the shareholders, I'm sure Sir Henry knew that the Lake Michigan service actually was of the break-bulk type which means unloading cargo on one side of the lake and reloading it for delivery on the other side.

True car ferry service on Lake Michigan was many years away since the Toledo, Ann Arbor and North Michigan, one of the predecessor companies of the present Ann Arbor Railroad, pioneered the hauling of freight cars across the lake late in 1892.

Sir Henry also drew attention to a map of the Michigan Air Line which ran from Ridgway (now known as Richmond) on the Chicago, Detroit & Canada Grand Trunk Junction to Romeo. The line had been extended to Rochester in March of 1879. Extension of this line to Pontiac would offer an opportunity to get out of the Vanderbilt trap and it was this possibility that brought hope to the Toledo & Ann Arbor backers.

Not too long after the shareholder's meeting, Sir Henry set sail for New York City and arrived there on May 11. Again he must have raised hope in Ann Arbor since he indicated that the Chicago and Lake Huron route was not the only one open for consideration. He told the press in New York that there were eight or nine other combinations which might be formed.

From New York, Sir Henry went to Montreal and after a short stay he and a retinue of Grand Trunk officials reached Detroit late on the night of Wednesday, May 21. The party checked into the Russell House and on Thursday began seeing various delegations interested in how the Grand Trunk was to get to Chicago.

The Toledo & Ann Arbor delegation went to Detroit on Friday, May 23, and was scheduled to see Sir Henry during the afternoon. Ashley headed the delegation. Also on hand were H. C. Waldron, A. W. Hamilton and John N. Gott. There were two professors also, Charles Ezra Greene, professor of civil engineering at the University, and James Craig Watson, a distinguished astronomer who had resigned from the U—M earlier in the year to accept a faculty position at the University of Wisconsin.

His presence with the group presents a bit of a mystery unless his resignation hadn't yet taken effect. Howard Peckham in his "The Making of The University of Michigan" says Watson's resignation had been due in part to his involvement with The Ann Arbor Register, a weekly news-

paper. Watson had been under almost continual editorial criticism from R. A. Beal, editor of the Ann Arbor Courier.

At any rate, all accounts of the meeting with Sir Henry, have Watson as a member of the Ann Arbor delegation. The best account of their meeting was published by the Detroit Free Press. The session with Sir Henry was delayed because when Joseph Hickson, Grand Trunk traffic manager, came out to welcome the group he saw James F. Joy in the lobby and asked permission to take the Detroit attorney and railroad builder in to see Sir Henry ahead of the Ann Arbor group.

So it was some time after 4 p.m. before the Toledo & Ann Arbor group completed their meeting with Sir Henry. The Free Press reporter said Ashley emerged wearing a "positively seraphic" look and when asked what luck he had had, Ashley replied "immense" and accompanied that remark with what was described as an "old time Congressional slap on the thigh."

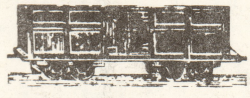
Then Ashley continued. "We didn't do very much but what we did had a nub to it," he said. "We told Sir Henry Tyler that we should build our road from Ann Arbor To Pontiac and wanted him to meet us at the latter point by finishing the line from Rochester thereto. We were assured that they would be in Pontiac ahead of us, and that, in a nutshell, is all our conference amounted to.

"You can tell the public that we left for home smiling, content and happy. I might add that we are going to build our road to Pontiac whether the Grand Trunk does anything or not. I shall never give up."

Then the Free Press reporter turned his attention to Professor Watson who said he thought the country is ahead of the railroads and that there is enough and more than enough business for all of the railroads in the United States. "Values of that kind of property were enormously inflated a few years ago," he continued, "but they have shrunk back to their true condition and there is now every promise of renewed and splendid prosperity."

As might be expected, the report in the Detroit News was different. Instead of about an hour, the News said the Ann Arbor group had only a half hour. The afternoon newspaper account also said, "President Tyler received them with studied politeness, and although the Ann Arbor gentlemen had nothing to show for their efforts, they nevertheless returned home well pleased with the results of the interview."

Nobody was really getting much information from Sir Henry. Charles Peck, receiver for the Chicago and Lake Huron, was quoted when he got back to Port Huron that the Grand Trunk party accepted information with great freedom but dispensed it with utmost economy.



Knowing of the Watson-Beal feud makes a reading of the three Ann Arbor weeklies of considerable interest. Both the Ann Arbor Register and The Michigan Argus had reasonably extensive accounts, both based on the Free Press report although Watson's Register does include an additional paragraph reporting that the delegation felt pretty well satisfied with the result of their interview. And undoubtedly the final sentence was provided by Watson since it reported there could be no doubt that the Wabash was favorably disposed to the plan.

But Beal's coverage in his Courier was nil. The big issue of the moment to him was not the possibility of another route to Chicago going through Ann Arbor but it was whether Republicans in the Union Army hadn't done more to defeat the Confederates in the Civil War than did the Democrats.

In fact, Beal's coverage of the railroad story was limited to one paragraph items reporting several meetings at the Court House to raise money for the proposed extension. On Friday, August 22, the Courier did report that the necessary funds had been raised "in this place and immediate vicinity." And indeed on Sept. 12th there was a report that the contract for grading the T&AA extension had been let to cover work between Peebles' Corners and Wixom. (Peebles' Corners at Five Mile Rd. and Pontiac Tr., was later called Worden.)

But by August and September, the bright hopes for a Chicago route via Ann Arbor had begun to fade. In fact on Saturday, June 21, the Grand Trunk acquired at auction in Detroit the Eastern Division of the Chicago and Lake Huron from Port Huron to Flint. And then it became known that on Dec. 24, 1878, a group of bondholders of the C&LH had gone to Montreal and worked out an agreement with the Grand Trunk. This was done after Vanderbilt, apparently feeling too secure in his position, had treated the bondholders rather coolly and the trip to Montreal had followed.

News throughout the summer was even less encouraging. At the end of July, the Grand Trunk had advertised for bids to construct a parallel route to the Chicago and North Eastern between Flint and Lansing.

Then on August 23, a committee acting as purchase trustees for the Grand Trunk bought the C&LH Western Division and then on Wednesday, Sept. 2, Vanderbilt surrendered and sold the Chicago and North Eastern to the Grand Trunk. All that was left was for the Grand Trunk to build a line from Valparaiso to connect in Chicago with a line of track already owned. So it was early in February of 1880 that the Grand

Trunk had its own route to Chicago and the hopes of going through Ann Arbor were over.

The Ann Arbor never did get to Pontiac although a line was graded beyond South Lyon which the Grand Trunk acquired when it completed the Michigan Air Line through to Jackson in 1884. And the Ann Arbor itself changed its route and built in a northwesterly route across the state reaching Frankfort in 1892.

Professor Watson's optimistic statement about the need for railroads, uttered in Detroit nearly 100 years ago, would need some rephrasing today. Both of the railroads which figured in my story tonight have fallen victim to declining traffic.

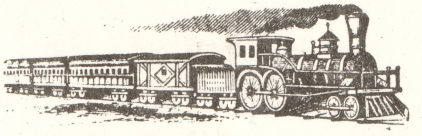
The Grand Trunk Western wants to discontinue service on the Michigan Air Line from Lakeland to Jackson and the Department of Transportation's recommendations for railroad reorganization in the Northeast and Midwest calls for even greater reduction in M.A.L. trackage.

And the Ann Arbor Railroad itself would virtually disappear if the Department of Transportation's recommendations survive a long series of hearings and final action by Congress. The DOT recommends preservation of only two segments of the Ann Arbor, one from Toledo to Dundee and the other from Pittsfield Junction, where there is a spurline to serve the Ford plant at Saline, to Whitmore Lake. The DOT recommends joint operation by the Ann Arbor and Grand Trunk Western of the trackage between Durand and Owosso but this obviously would become a GTW operation since there would be no Ann Arbor Railroad left south of Durand and northwest of Owosso.

So instead of being part of a through route to Chicago, the Michigan Air Line section of the Grand Trunk Western Railroad and the Ann Arbor Railroad face a somewhat uncertain future today. Something may still happen and both lines may survive but it is obvious their role will be far less glamorous than had been hoped for back in 1878 and 1879.

I don't know what happened to the Toledo, Ann Arbor & Northeastern which was organized in Ann Arbor in 1878 since the extension beyond Ann Arbor to South Lyon was known as the Toledo, Ann Arbor and Grand Trunk. The name was changed to the Toledo, Ann Arbor & North Michigan as the line extended across the state, reaching Frankfurt.

Then, beset by financial troubles most of the time, the railroad was organized as the Ann Arbor Railroad Company in 1895 following the financial panic of 1893. A lot of U. S. railroads underwent reorganization at that time but the whole railroad industry emerged into a much stronger financial structure and all of the railroads underwent a period of great technological improvement from 1897 to 1907.



Then when the U. S. roads seemed on the verge of becoming a truly great railroad system, Congress began strengthening the Interstate Commerce Commission starting with the Hepburn act which gave the I. C. C. the power to regulate maximum rates and then in 1910 came the Mann-Elkins act which gave the I.C.C. power to suspend rate increases until their reasonableness could be determined.

With the help of the Ralph Nader of his day, Louis D. Brandeis, a Boston attorney who was to become a member of the U. S. Supreme Court, and a timid and indecisive Interstate Commerce Commission, the railroads were denied rate increases in 1910, 1914 and 1915.

All of the great technological progress of the 1897-1907 period came to a screeching halt since denial of the rate increases deprived the railroads of over $5 billion which would have gone into continuance of the improvements. So the railroads entered the era of World War I in very bad financial shape. It is ironic that the rate increases denied from 1910 to 1915 were quickly put into effect after Woodrow Wilson nationalized the railroads on Dec. 27, 1917. And there was a further increase before the railroads were returned to private ownership.

Instead of helping things, Congress made everything worse in 1920 by giving the Interstate Commerce Commission the power to regulate minimum rates so railroad management became more and more frustrated as trucks began taking away the more profitable types of freight during the 1920's and the railroads were powerless to prevent it. In fact up until 1958, truckers could delay or prevent changes in railroad rates merely by objecting and forcing lengthy I. C. C. hearings.

The depression of the 1930's further frustrated railroad management but the hard times were forgotten in the traffic-heavy period of World War II. But then came the post-war period and this country embarked on the world's worst national transportation policy as federal, state and local governments splurged on highway spending and lavish support of the airlines. Had it not been for the law of physics which makes the steel wheel on the flanged rail the most economical user of energy in transporting freight and people, the lop-sideness of government spending might have submerged the railroads for good.

The current energy crisis seems to offer a chance for our various units of government to alter their thinking about our transportation policies.

The Watergate mess removed from the White House staff the

most violent critics of Amtrak, the nation's first national railroad passenger service. Doubts about Amtrak's success now have turned into concern over whether Amtrak can cope with success since passenger volume already is at the level predicted for 1977 and the needed additional passenger equipment is at least two years away.

The White House is urging changes in regulatory procedures to help the railroads but Congress is likely to continue slumbering over the proposals. Since the railroads' problems really began away back in the 1910's, it is quite obvious that Congressmen can't recognize a wrong even though it has existed for about 60 years.

At any rate if Congress acts and if the railroad reorganization is ever completed in the Northeast and Midwest, the future of the railroads will look better but perhaps not good enough to save the Michigan Air Line and the Ann Arbor.

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Keylining: Dorothy Wood and Anna Thorsch
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COUNTY CALENDAR

Chelsea Area Historical Society--8 p.m. Monday, Dec. 8, at First Congregational Church. Election of officers.

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Dexter Historical Society--7:30 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 20, at Wylie School Cafetorium. Sound movie about Colonial Williamsburg.

DHS Annual Christmas Bazaar--10 to 3 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 6, at Scio Township Hall, 827 N. Zeeb Rd.

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Milan Historical Society--7:30 p.m. third Wednesday of month at Milan Community House.

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Saline Area Historical Society--8 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 18, at First Savings Association, 179 E. Michigan Ave. Wayne Predmore of Clinton will show and discuss unusual antiques.

New three-way joint membership fees will be announced whereby local members may join the county and state societies for a reduced fee.

MRS. GILLIHAN HEADS NEW SALEM HISTORICAL SOCIETY

A new group, the Salem Historical Society has been organized at Salem this fall with Doris Gillihan as chairperson.

The other officers are Pam Kelly, vice-chairperson; Loretta Cergol, secretary; and Ronald Lyke, treasurer.

A bazaar is planned Dec. 12 and 13 to benefit the society. For more information about it telephone Mrs. Gillihan at Northville 349-5447 or Celia Bodnar, South Lyon 437-6681.

John Burkman of the Northville Historical Society will show a film at the group's meeting at 8 p.m. Monday, Nov. 17, at Salem Township Hall.

PREVIEW OF 1976 MEETINGS

Dave Pollock, vice-president and program chairman, offers the following preview of 1976 meetings.

The January meeting will be on antique furniture restoration. In February, Wystan Stevens will talk about Ann Arbor buildings of historical interest. Both meetings are scheduled on the fourth Thursday of the month in Liberty Hall.

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Washtenaw
Historical Society
Meeting
NOVEMBER 20,1975
8:00 P.M.
LIBERTY HALL
ANN ARBOR FEDERAL SAVINGS
LIBERTY AT DIVISION

Miss Eileen Harrison
322 E. Cross St.
Ypsilanti, Mi. 48197